The Los Angeles Daily Journal

Page 1 Section II Thursday, August 1, 1985

Police Panel Prepares for Release of Kennedy Files

City News Service

The Los Angeles Police Commission began preparations Wednesday to release the 10-volume, 1,500-page summary of the LAPD's investigation of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy.

The commission voted Tuesday to appoint a subcommittee to develop guidelines for the ultimate release of the department's 50,000 pages of original investigative files on the June 5, 1968, assassination of the presidential hopeful in the pantry of the Ambassador Hotel.

According to a proposal by Commission Vice President Sam Williams and passed by the commission, the release of the summary is to commence immediately under the direction of a commission subcommittee and with advice from the City Attorney's Office.

Only those parts of the summary that do not violate national security, privacy and rights of confidentially and other legal restraints will be released.

The subcommittee, which must still be appointed, has been charged with developing the original guidelines into a set of standards to be applied during the release of the original files.

Deputy City Attorney Byron Boeckman told the commission, however, that the city attorney's office would have to look into the actual legal stipulations about the release of city property.

He said the ultimate release might require approval from the City Council.

During a break at Tuesday's meeting, Police Commission president Stephen Yslas said the subcommittee would be appointed then and most probably during the closed session.

The commission's decision came after years of requests by private parties, journalists and public archives for the release of the LAPD's investigation.

Sirhan Sirhan was convicted of first degree murder in the assassination on April 17, 1969. Since that time only a small portion of the LAPD's investigation has been released to the public.

Philip H. Melanson, a professor of political science and director of the Robert F. Kennedy Assassination Archive at Southeastern Massachusetts University, told the commission that the Los Angeles district attorney has released its documents and the FBI is presently declassifying its own investigation files for release.

Melanson maintained, however, "the LAPD files are the primary investigative files in one of the major assassinations in this country's history."

In his address to the commission, he charged the five-member board to grant the release because of the "major national and historical importance" of the files.

Included in the 50,000 pages of documents are 1,700 photographs, records of booked evidence, and numerous hours of audio and video tape compiled during the 13-month investigation under the direction of the LAPD's "Special Unit Senator" RFK assassination task force.

Police Chief Daryl F. Gates told the commission he favored the release of the files at some future date. He said he favored keeping the files that can not be released because of legal restrictions and "shipping the rest off" to be released at some future date.

However, Gates continued, "I don't know if the time (for release) has arrived."

The police chief said he was concerned that people could be harmed by the release of the files, because their "privacy could be invaded," and he said the LAPD could be harmed because "we didn't keep faith with people who thought their confidentiality would be guaranteed."